

Even Screwworms Can't Cause Panic In Shortgrassers

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10-17-68

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MERTZON — Winter can't be far off. The flies are hovering around the rafters of the sheds and barns. What rain we've had in the past 10 days has failed to make the grass grow. Nights and early mornings are brisk and cool. All signs indicate that cold weather will soon come.

Widespread reports of screwworm cases make the threat of frost seems a little softer. Texas had had 43,000 cases this year, and ranchers everywhere have begun to wonder if the only pestilence we ever had under control is going to resume nibbling on our flocks.

The Shortgrass Country won't suffer much if the screwworms do return. Our economy has reached a point of stability that defies disruption by minor or major problems. While the rest of ranchdom has run in circles, balancing a plague here against a disaster there, we've arrived at a peak of durability that would make the Rock of Gibraltar look like a pile of peach blossoms.

Any number of examples could be given. For instance we licked the heifer calf catastrophe a full year ahead of the rest of the industry. When it became apparent that young she-stock was about as popular with calf feeders as a coin operated lie detector would be in Washington, D. C., we slyly kept over yearlings that in many cases lost less than \$10 a head. Tax deductions were gained at such a rate that the drugstores sold out of red ink and the Internal Revenue Service started mailing their forms postage due.

Inflation was conquered by the same awareness. Six months ago, windmill parts doubled in price. As the news spread, the cost of frijole beans rose a nickel per pound. Then boots and blue denim trousers jointed the upward race. Cow feed was quoted steady to rising. Meanwhile, the future of every commodity raised out here was a dull as the trinkets in an old maid's hope chest.

No one panicked. The children were advised to drink less water and to control their appetites. Housewives learned to take an even better rock count before buying a sack of beans. (We have forever operated on such a close margin that we've had to calculate which package of beans was the cleanest.) The famous Shortgrass patch-over-patch method of mending was revived to meet the clothing crisis. Before the impact of the sorry market condition could hit, the interest rate on borrowed money moved up a percent or two and put everybody's mind elsewhere.

These and similar situations make it impossible for this country to be shaken by a mass reoccurrence of screwworms. Let the wormies come! We have a backlog of strength that can stand anything, that is, if it doesn't last over 10 days at a stretch.